

the bill forward as a stand-alone bill. As we go into Veterans Day, let's honor those who served by the actions they see us take.

ENSURING PROMISES MADE TO VETERANS

(Mr. SIREs asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SIREs. Madam Speaker, as America prepares to honor our veterans and those who continue to wear the uniform this weekend, the Democratic Congress is proud of our record over the last 10 months that has provided real support for our troops and our veterans.

Today, we will take a vote on a final veterans bill that increases funding for veterans health care by \$6.7 billion, making it the single largest increase in veterans funding in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration. This bill invests \$3.8 billion more than the President requested.

The final conference report also includes \$500 million above the President's request for much-needed maintenance in VA health care facilities, and \$600 million more than the President's request for mental health, PTSD and traumatic brain injury. This investment is critically important at a time when one-third of the veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan face mental health challenges.

Madam Speaker, today let us ensure that no veteran is left behind by supporting this bill that fulfills our promises to our Nation's veterans.

FUNDING OUR VETERANS

(Mrs. DRAKE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. DRAKE. Madam Speaker, this is day 37. That is 37 days so far that our veterans have not had the use of increased funding for their benefits and health care. That is \$18.5 million a day not able to be used. In June this House passed this appropriation bill with a \$6 billion increase in a bipartisan manner. On September 6, the Senate completed their bill.

This work is done; yet the bill has not been sent to the President who has agreed to sign it. And why? Because the Democratic leadership has decided to use funding for our veterans as a smoke screen in an effort to pass billions in unrelated domestic spending.

Our veterans are not pawns in a political game. They are heroes. These funding issues must be considered separately and on their own merits. America expects us to get the job done. America expects us to provide the best care to our veterans. Our veterans deserve no less.

Please join me in calling upon the Democratic leadership to put our veterans first and send a clean veterans appropriation bill to the President.

DEMOCRATS IMPROVE VETERANS BENEFITS

(Mrs. CAPPS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CAPPS. Madam Speaker, as we approach the Veterans Day holiday, I want to express my support for all men and women who have ever served our country. I congratulate the new Democratic Congress for making remarkable improvements to veterans benefits.

During this past year, we have already appropriated the largest increase in veterans health spending ever. We have also taken steps to increase awareness about posttraumatic stress disorder and other mental health needs among veterans.

In addition, we seek to improve our ability to prevent, to diagnose and treat these conditions. I especially would like to note a new awareness about the needs of our women veterans, and commend my colleagues in the Women's Caucus for making the needs of women veterans a priority of ours during this Congress.

As we commemorate Veterans Day this weekend, let us all make a commitment to continuing and renewing our efforts to improve benefits for all veterans.

DEMOCRATS USE MILCON-VA BILL AS POLITICAL TOOL

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, it has been 8 weeks since the Senate passed the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs appropriations bill and joined the House in demonstrating overwhelming and bipartisan support for this legislation. Yet, for two full months, the Democrat leadership has refused to send this important piece of legislation to the floor. They refuse to give our veterans the funding they deserve.

This week the majority will bring the VA bill to the floor attached to the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education appropriations bill. Rather than send these bills to the President on a stand-alone basis, something the Democratic leadership promised they would do, they are using this VA bill as a political tool to push through other legislation.

As a veteran and military parent, I know it is time that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle stop using the military and our veterans as a political tool to help advance their other spending priorities.

In conclusion, God bless our troops and we will never forget September the 11th.

DEMOCRATS TAKE AMERICA IN NEW DIRECTION

(Mr. WELCH of Vermont asked and was given permission to address the

House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Madam Speaker, 1 year ago the American people went to the voting booths and voted for a new direction. This decision was not only asking for a new Congress, but asking Congress to head in a new direction. One area: Make America safer.

The last Congress ignored the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. This Congress is implementing the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. Our ports and skies are safer. Our first responders have better access to emergency communication. We are also recognizing very straightforward and directly that the cost of the war must include the cost of caring for the warrior, and that is why we have passed the largest increase in the veterans health care budget in the history of the Veterans Administration.

And finally, with cop-on-the-beat oversight, we have uncovered the scandal of tens of billions of dollars of waste, fraud and abuse by companies like Blackwater and Halliburton that have benefited enormously from our appropriations.

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QUIT PLAYING POLITICS WITH OUR VETERANS

(Mr. GINGREY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GINGREY. Madam Speaker, as all Members rise to salute our veterans just 5 days from now, I'm appalled that the Democratic majority is holding these veterans hostage by combining a bill that we passed in this House 5 months ago to increase funding for our veterans, as they pointed out in regard particularly to health care, \$6 billion, and the President is ready to sign that bill. But, no, the Democratic majority wants to hold that bill and our veterans hostage so they can pass a bloated-up, pork-laden, Health and Human Services-Labor bill that increases spending over the President's request by \$9 billion.

I think this is a deplorable thing, and I have called for the end of it in House Resolution 786, which would change the rules of the House so that no House could ever combine our MilCon-Veterans Administration budget again with any other appropriations bill. It would have to pass as a stand-alone bill.

Let's quit playing politics with our veterans.

DEMOCRATS HAVE PRIORITIZED THE NEEDS OF OUR VETERANS SINCE DAY ONE

(Mr. PERLMUTTER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Madam Speaker, this weekend and next Monday we will